



Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission Hearing

Challenges & Opportunities: The Advancement of Human Rights in India

Tuesday, June 7th, 2016

3:00 PM – 5:00 PM

1334 Longworth House Office Building

Closing Statement

As we conclude today, I would like to thank all of our distinguished witnesses for their testimony and their courage in speaking out on these issues. I must also thank my distinguished Co-Chair, Mr. McGovern, and the other Members of this Commission who have committed to addressing the human rights abuses raised today.

There is clearly much progress left to be made, and perhaps one of my greatest concerns is the willingness, or lack thereof, of the state of India to recognize the challenges that exist and to take the necessary steps to confront these challenges. In many cases, we observe reluctance by some in India to address these issues, and still some who actively suppress anyone who would attempt to raise a dissenting voice.

Turning a blind eye to major human rights abuses also runs counter to our nations' mutual interests. India and its citizens should rightly be proud of the prominent role their nation plays, both regionally and globally. Our two nations share many common values, and the friendship between us will likely continue to grow. Yet friends do not let friends ignore human rights abuses, and no truly strong and lasting partnership can be forged with the United States if deeply held

convictions are forgotten. Religious freedom, free speech, and the right to live life free from any form of slavery are principles deeply engrained in the consciousness of the American people, as they are for many in India as well.

That's why it is my sincere hope that the Indian government's current posture will change direction and acknowledge the human rights challenges that have been discussed here today while also outlining plans for confronting these challenges.

I also must use this opportunity to once again publically call on the Indian government to lift its informal ban on visas for members of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom. No other major democracy has so persistently refused to allow the Commission to visit, while countries with appalling human rights track records have previously welcomed the Commission. The refusal to even allow USCIRF entry can only prove to abridge our shared goals of protecting this fundamental right.

Furthermore, high ranking public officials must be quick to publically condemn acts of violence against religious or marginalized minorities. When Muslims are lynched in the streets for allegedly slaughtering cows or churches are set ablaze, generalized statements about the importance of tolerance are not enough. Perpetrators must be brought to justice, and the federal government must send an unmistakably clear message to its citizens that groups which advocate violence on the basis of religion or ethnicity do so in absolute violation of individuals' human rights, and that their government will always come down on the side of protecting those rights.

Lastly, I would like to take this time to welcome Prime Minister Modi and thank him for his commitment to advancing relations with the United States. I would also like to thank Speaker Ryan and President Obama for their initiative in fostering this relationship. The attention to India's human rights climate comes against the backdrop of increased engagement and cooperation. I am a proponent of increased ties with India and believe our budding relationship has the potential to reap great dividends in promoting our shared values. Heightened scrutiny of India's human rights record should not be construed as a blight on this strategic relationship. Rather, it should be recognized as a warranted step on a path of cooperation and an essential responsibility of any democracy.

This Commission has and will always be committed to advancing the cause of human rights, wherever and whenever the need presents itself. I look forward to working with all of the witnesses who have spoken here today as we take advantage of the opportunities to address these concerns.